

### SOVIET SUCCESSION STRUGGLE

The political struggle to succeed Konstantin U. Chernenko as the CPSU General Secretary has visibly intensified in recent weeks.

Chernenko's prolonged absence from public view, punctuated by a contrived and not very reassuring reappearance on Soviet television, has been marked by voluminous gossip about his physical and political decline, much of it emanating from Soviet security organs. Visible but not very effective efforts have been made to assert his continued authority in the Soviet public eye.

Clear preference in public protocol and widespread rumors have indicated a concerted effort to establish Gorbachev as the frontrunner to succeed. It is not likely, however, that Gorbachev or any other candidate has assured control over the timing and outcome of a succession scenario.

Nevertheless, we have some reporting that a plan to replace Chernenko for "health reasons" in the near future is under consideration in the Soviet leadership.

The removal of Ogarkov as Chief of the General Staff adds a new twist to the succession maneuvering. It highlights the potential role of the military (and possibly the KGB) in Soviet politics, and also the determination of Soviet party leaders to prevent that role from asserting itself.

Ogarkov was almost certainly not removed as a result of a more or less normal policy dispute, e.g., over budgets.

Although one report suggests he was scapegoated over Afghanistan problems, it seems more likely that lower level officers would have fallen victim if that were the main concern.

Ustinov has been a strong supporter of Ogarkov up till now; but it is hard to imagine his removal without Ustinov's blessing. There is no evidence that Ustinov is in trouble.

It is possible that Ogarkov fell victim to a combination of factors both personal -- his strong professional image and ambition, which may have been threatening to political leaders -- and institutional -- more widespread resentment in the Soviet military leadership at large about the internal state of the USSR and the inability of an aging, divided party leadership to improve it.

It is highly likely that professional Soviet military leaders are distressed about long-term economic trends in the USSR and other internal problems because of their future impact on Soviet military strength; some reporting conveys this distress.

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The political controls and propaganda aimed at keeping the Soviet military out of Soviet politics also habituate Soviet military leaders to worry about the "fate of the nation".

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The failure of the Soviets' campaign in Afghanistan to progress has occasioned pessimism, complaints, and intramural backbiting in the Soviet military which could become focused on the political leadership.

The Soviet military -- whose national visibility is not matched by real political clout in the Politburo -- may resent and fear the political role of the KGB, which exercises irritating controls within the military and an unusual degree of influence over top-level political developments (having played a key role in Andropov's rise to power).

If Soviet political leaders have sensed this kind of sentiment in the Soviet military, they may have moved against Ogarkov, despite their own competing interests, to "nip in the bud" any military intervention through an exemplary action.

If this diagnosis is correct, however, it would suggest that the potential for some kind of military intervention in Soviet leadership politics has not been conclusively removed. The attitudes that could inspire it are likely to persist.

Even if Chernenko leaves the political scene soon, no aspirant for his job is presently a shoe-in, and whoever gets it will need months, if not years, to consolidate power. Thus the outlook favors protracted struggle within the Soviet leadership before there is reestablished the kind of balance between strong personal leadership and collective consensus on which rule of the party and the country depend.

The implications of this situation for Soviet foreign policy behavior are necessarily uncertain. However, while Chernenko is around and contenders are still struggling to succeed, the odds favor policy continuity, risk avoidance, and difficulty in reaching new decisions. Once one figure has succeeded to the General Secretaryship and is trying to consolidate his power, the odds favoring policy initiatives, possibly risky ones, go up.

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